

# 4 Think twice before using pesticides



Scientists have found 23 pesticides (weed and bug killers) in our local streams, many at levels that may damage salmon and other wildlife.

Overuse of these products can also damage soil and plant health. And studies find increased health risks

among families that use lawn and garden pesticides, especially among pets and children.

The good news is, we just don't need most of those chemicals. Here's how to get started reducing pesticide risk while making a healthier landscape.

## Most bugs are good bugs.

Only about 5% of the bugs in your yard are pests. "Good bugs" like the ground beetle (top) and the green lacewing (bottom) help control pests.



"good bug" that eats problem pests. Whether it's a bug, disease, or weed, you need to identify it to know how to effectively manage it.

## Start with prevention.

- Build healthy soil with compost and mulch – soil organisms protect plants from many disease and insect pest problems.
- Select pest-resistant plants, and put them in the sun and soil conditions they like.
- Clean up diseased plants, and compost dead plants in fall to reduce hiding places for insect pests.
- Pull weeds before they go to seed and spread.
- Use a variety of plants, so if pests attack one plant, others can fill its place.

## Identify the problem before you spray, squash, or stomp.

The problem could really be incorrect mowing or pruning, improper watering, or other easily corrected practices. Or that scary bug could actually be a beneficial

## Accept a little damage.

Natural predators often bring pests under control, but they need time to work. Don't spray at the first sign of damage – nature may control it for you, or plants may just outgrow the damage.

## If a pest or weed problem develops, use the least toxic solution.

Physical controls like traps, barriers, fabric row covers, or repellants may work for pests. Long handled weed pullers pop dandelions out easily. Mulching once a year reduces weeds in beds. Less toxic products like soaps, horticultural oils, and plant-based insecticides that work for many problems are now available. Beneficial insects that prey on problem bugs are available for sale, or you can attract these "good bugs" by planting a variety of plants that provide pollen and nectar all year.



Long handled weed pullers pop dandelions out easily.

## Use chemical pesticides as the last resort.

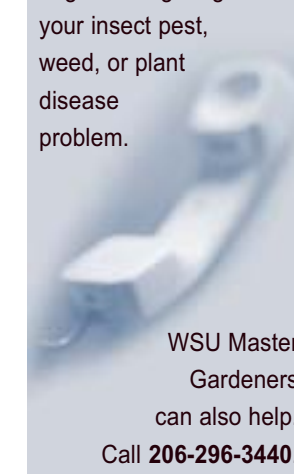
If you must use a chemical pesticide, use the least toxic product, and spot apply it – don't spread it all over the yard to kill a few weeds or bugs. It may be best to have a professional who has all the protective gear do the application, but don't use services that spread chemicals over the whole yard or spray on a calendar schedule. You want to apply pesticides only when and where you really have a problem. Follow label instructions exactly – more is not better. And be sure to keep children and pets out of application areas.

## Replace problem plants with pest-resistant ones for a healthier, easier to care for yard.

If a plant, even a tree, has insect pest or disease problems every year, it's time to replace it with a more tolerant variety or another type of plant that doesn't have these problems.

## Got a tough pest problem? Help is only a call away.

Call the Natural Lawn & Garden Hotline at **206-633-0224** for free brochures, and expert help in identifying "good bugs" and figuring out your insect pest, weed, or plant disease problem.



WSU Master Gardeners can also help. Call **206-296-3440**.